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The Rev. Alan Walker, author of the following account of the Mission to the Nation in Australia, was the leader of the Mission. He was the chief organiser of the Mission, and the principal evangelist in its major meetings. His work during the Mission took him to all the Australian states, and he conducted the large meetings in their capital cities. Prior to his work as leader of the Mission, Mr. Walker was pastor of the community Church in a semi-industrial suburb of Sydney. Mr. Walker is now in the United States, lecturing on evangelism at Drew Theological Seminary, and serving as Visiting Preacher for the Mission to the Nation of the Methodist Church in the United States.

THE MISSION TO THE NATION

In April 1953 the Methodist Church of Australasia, after careful preparation, launched its "Mission to the Nation". Its purpose was to go out to the Australian people wherever they would listen with the challenge of the Christian faith. By mass meetings and a using of the highways of communication available in a modern society it was hoped to reach particularly the 50% of Australians who are beyond the normal reach of the churches.

Two vital decisions were made at the beginning of the campaign. One was that in the initial stages the Church would emphasise that it was not standing over against the people criticising them, but that it was in penitence sharing with them the sense of guilt for the failure of the nation to rise to Christian standards and to receive the good news of Christ. Second, the Mission was not to be narrowly denominational. It was declared at the outset that the purpose of the Mission was not to make Methodists but under God to multiply the number of practising, worshipping Christians in Australia.

REFERAT FÜR EVANGELISATION · STUDIENABTEILUNG · OEKUMENISCHER RAT DER KIRCHEN

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In the message of the Mission a twofold emphasis has been given throughout. The first task, of course, has been to seek that individual men and women should become linked with the transforming power of God through Jesus Christ. Second, the Mission has been national in dimensions. An attempt has been made to bring national and international issues before the judgment seat of Christ. The Mission has sought, by the Holy Spirit, to enable men to realise their sonship in Jesus Christ and to fashion a world fit for the children of God to live in.

Five major methods have been used in the Mission to the Nation. It has depended upon the power of mass meetings. One-day visits in smaller centres and up to eight-day series in capital cities throughout the commonwealth have been made. Wherever possible meetings have been held on "neutral territory" rather than in church buildings. It has been found throughout Australia that two or three times more people will gather in non-sacred buildings than on church premises. The response in attendances has been almost startling. As Australian Missioner I have seen almost one million people come to Mission meetings in three years. Open confession of faith has been sought by people at meetings. One sentence has been placed before them; the call has been made for people to say "I commit myself to Jesus Christ in the fellowship of His Church". Several thousands of people have openly signed this commitment at public meetings.

"Commando" techniques as used in British evangelism some years ago have also been followed. Wherever Australians have gathered, attempts have been made to have Christian speakers visit them. Hence on football grounds at half-time and at theatres at intervals, in clubs, on wharves and railway shunting yards and in large open-air meetings the message has gone forth. Again the Church has been surprised at the readiness with which men and women have been willing to allow a Christian spokesman to appear in their midst.

Perhaps the most significant feature of the Mission to the Nation has been its use of radio. For the first time in the history of Australian radio the Christian Church has bought time at peak listening hours on commercial radio stations. On as many as 64 stations each week, across the country a specially designed half-hour "Drama With a Challenge" has been presented. In these dramatic presentations, specially written for the Mission to the Nation, an attempt has been made to draw together drama and religion in an attractive programme designed to win and hold the interest of men and women outside the influence of more conventional preaching methods. Radio ratings have shown that perhaps as many as 1.000.000 listeners a week have tuned in to the Mission to the Nation "Drama With a Challenge" at 8.30 p.m. on a Tuesday night. Thousands of letters have come as a result of these programmes. Many who are closest to the Mission to the Nation are convinced that this feature is the most valuable discovery that has been made.

Evangelism by the printed page has been carried forward. Well over 100.000 copies of specially prepared literature have been sold. The Press has been most generous in its coverage. As much as 56 feet of reporting

of meetings being given in four capital city daily papers in one week. During this year a Press campaign of paid insertions in the secular press has been undertaken. Under the title of "News With a Challenge" an attempt has been made to carry by the medium of the printed page the same kind of message as went out through radio.

Finally, but by no means least in importance, great activity has been attempted by the local Christian congregation. Each of the 2,700 Methodist Churches in Australia have been encouraged to take their own iniative in approaching their own community. During 1955 a church membership campaign has been undertaken with emphasis upon Visitation Evangelism. Perhaps this aspect of the Mission has been least successful, for only a small percentage of churches have risen to the task of Visitation Evangelism. It is clear that the Mission to the Nation faces a long task of bringing about a reorientation of the thinking of local ministers and people, if evangelism will take its rightful place in the life of local churches.

Insights from the Mission

Out of three years' experience, insights and discoveries of great value to the Australian Church have come. Following are some of the lessons that have been learned from this large-scale venture in evangelism.

1. Australian Methodism must continue to plan and witness on a national basis. State boundaries have been far too rigidly drawn, making five State Churches rather than one Commonwealth-wide Church. To plan a truly national Church witness together from coast to coast, to grow together as through national conventions, strengthens the whole Church. A national Methodist consciousness and vision must be increasingly and quickly fashioned.

2. The struggle to place evangelism at the very centre of the Church's concern just not cease. In 1948, when the Crusade for Christ was launched, evangelism was at a low ebb. God has stirred His Church to action. By steady and persistent planning, ways must be found for keeping evangelism at the forefront of the thinking and acting of the Church.

3. Promotional activity in evangelism must go on. Evangelism cannot be left to local initiative alone. Local ministers and congregations, particularly in more isolated areas, are not given sufficient challenge and assistance by the whole Church. National evangelistic enterprises, periodic visits, a continuing flow of printed material, well-produced radio, and presently, television programmes, are essential if the Church is to advance.

4. The inspirational power which comes through mass meetings has been rediscovered. There are those who still question the value of large meetings. The answer is: What is wanted? Small meetings? Of those there have been many. Now we know that small causes are stimulated by periodic demonstrations of Christian strength.

5. The necessary nexus between national witness and local activity has been clearly shown. National witness, as through radio and press, is soon dissipated unless followed up by the local church. On the other hand, isolated local activity tends to be impotent in a mass society. Much further thought and planning are necessary to develop a right relationship between the two. Also the preparation for, and follow up of, visits by a missioner must be far more thoroughly developed for missions to return their full value to the local church.

6. Evangelism and social witness belong together. This is another insight which has come from the Mission to the Nation. Evangelism without a social conscience issues in irrelevant piety with no vital message for the present age. Social witness without evangelism ends in futility and impotence. A message aiming at one and the same time to link men individually to the transforming power of Christ and to fashion a world order fit for the children of God is needed in Australia.

7. Perhaps the greatest discovery of the Mission has been the power of mass means of communication and how they may be used for the proclamation of the Christian faith. The man of power today is not the king or baron, not the capitalist, but he who sits in control of press, radio and television. His decisions are conditioning the minds of men so that they cannot "hear" the Gospel. The Church must break this secular, materialist conditioning process by sending its own message along these vast communication channels. The Church which will continue to use radio, press and, ultimately television, will make it more possible for men and women to receive the message of the local minister throughout the land.

8. By calling for a continuing policy of congregational witness and visitation evangelism the Mission to the Nation has virtually been seeking to re-orientate the whole attitude of the Church. Australian Methodism has not been living with this vision, nor has it been organised for aggressive evangelism. So great a change in emphasis will only come gradually to the Church. A longer period than six months will be needed to convince local churches that evangelism is their supreme task and that in such methods as visitation evangelism a proven means of advance is available. A long task of promotional activity will be required for the reorientation of the Church's mind toward evangelism for it to become the accepted pattern of congregational life.

9. The Mission to the Nation has shown that denominationalism is a great obstruction to evangelism. We were divinely led to the choice of a title and an emphasis in message which went beyond the advancement of our own narrower interests as a Church. If we had sought to save our own life as a Church, we would have lost it. In any further planning in evangelism we must not forget this insight by falling back to a more insistent denominationalism in our evangelistic witness.

10. The Mission to the Nation has been an essay in faith. With some concern we were taken forward into bold and financially costly planning. And God has seen us through. By expecting much from God we have received much. Not again must we plan timidly. In faith we must go on. God does

not fail those who would in largeness do His will.

At is inception the Mission to the Nation was going to be a six-months' campaign. So great was the encouragement given that the Church decided to go on. Recently the decision was made to continue the Mission for a further period. Australian Methodism has placed its hand in a new way to the plough of evangelism. It does not intend to look back.